

A Haven for Migrant Birds



Some birds fly thousands of kilometres every year to escape the cold and hunger of winter. Leaving their homes in places like the tundras of Siberia, they head south for the warmth and bounty of sunny southern climes. The power of flight has thus enabled these birds to experience what has been called an “endless summer”.

Singapore is one of the stops along the East Asian Flyway. This is a migration route that takes birds from the northern countries of Asia, across Indo-China and Thailand, then down through Peninsular Malaysia. Singapore, being at the southern tip of the peninsula, is a focal point for these migrants. Some of them spend their entire “winter” here, others use Singapore as a transit stop. They feed and roost here for a few days, then resume their journey southward to Indonesia, Australia or New Zealand.

Sungei Buloh is home to over 160 species of birds. About 60% of these species are resident birds living and breeding here, and the rest are migrants. Most migrant birds arrive at the Park from September through November, and they leave for their homes back north from March to late May the following year. The Park provides its feathered guests with feeding grounds and roosting sites. Half of the migrant species are waders (shorebirds), the other half comprise passerines (perching birds) and others.

While migrant passerines may be observed in almost any type of habitat in Singapore, the waders show site fidelity i.e. they return to the same wetland site year after year.

The best time to observe waders is when they are feeding on the mud-flats during the incoming tide. Enjoy these birds in the cool comfort of one of our hides, specially provided for birdwatching. Here, you will be able to view the birds without being seen by them, so they can go about their activities undisturbed. Don't forget your binoculars, a “must have” for the birdwatcher! With some luck you may be able to catch the wondrous spectacle of Mongolian Plovers and Curlew Sandpipers arriving by the hundreds at the coastal mud-flats. Common Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers and Pacific Golden Plovers are some of the other waders commonly encountered at the Park.



A flock of waders at the mud-flats.

Our migrant passerines include the Arctic Warblers which breed in forests across Siberia, and the Great Weed Warblers, Barn Swallows and Dollar Birds that fly in from various parts of Asia. Listen to their calls in the early hours of the morning, and observe them at breakfast among the foliage of the trees.

Come and experience the thrill of birdwatching that awaits you here.

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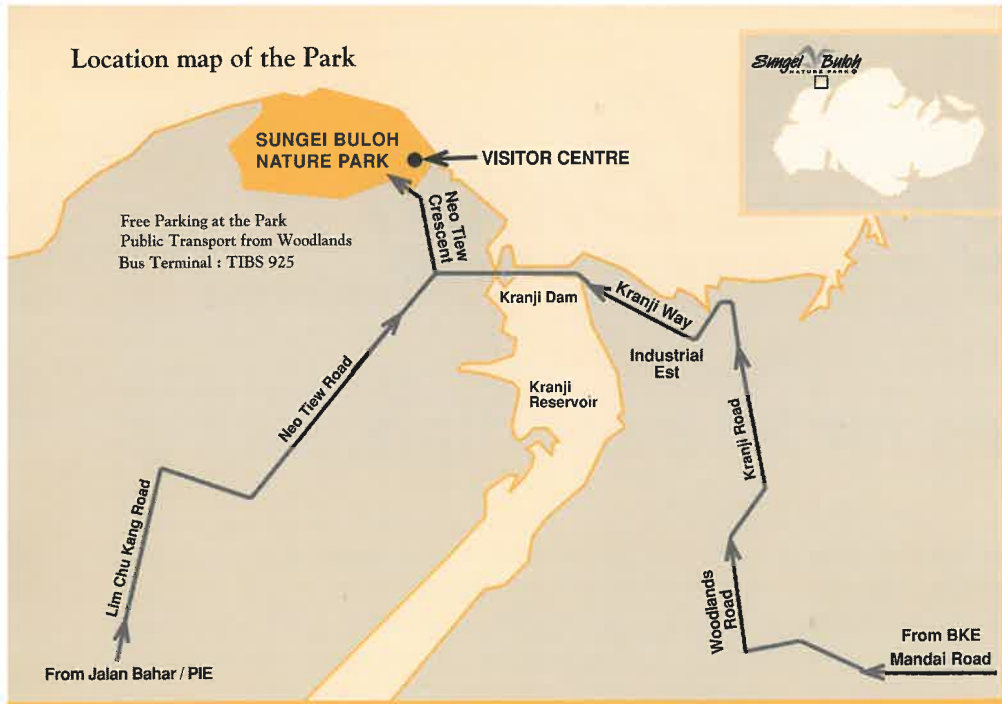
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Location map of the Park



First Anniversary Celebrations

Sungei Buloh Nature Park, officially opened on 6 December 1993, celebrated its first anniversary in December 1994.

To mark the occasion, guided night rambles were conducted for members of the public from 12 to 14 December 1994.

Despite the rain, the response was good—crowds of well over a hundred turned up each night. Visitors had exciting encounters with the wonders of the wild, their enjoyment of the ramble enhanced by the tranquil ambience of the Park after dark.

From 4 to 14 December 1994, there was a written quiz open to children below 16 years old. Those who submitted all-correct entries won attractive Sungei Buloh First Anniversary badges.

Throughout December, an exhibition highlighting interesting aspects of Sungei Buloh's flora and fauna was open to visitors. Activity Sheets were also distributed to family groups to help them in the exploration of the Park.

One Night Rambler's Experience

I arrived at the Park at 6.20 in the evening, armed with a torchlight and a big umbrella. I didn't need the umbrella after all, because the night of 14 December 1994 turned out to be exceptionally fine.

Many eager rambles were already gathered around the Park's Visitor Centre. We were split into groups, and started off with a walk through the Mangrove Boardwalk. At the entrance to the boardwalk, we were greeted by a colourful snake about a metre long. It had caught a lizard for its supper, and Allan, the Park's guide, identified it as a Paradise Tree Snake.

Dusk descended as we entered the mangrove forest, and the tide was out. With the help of torches, we were able to spot the volcano-like mounds of mud lobsters, crabs scurrying about in the mud and lots of mangrove oysters. The fascinating and varied root formations of mangrove trees provided an enchanting backdrop to the nightlife of the mangrove swamp.

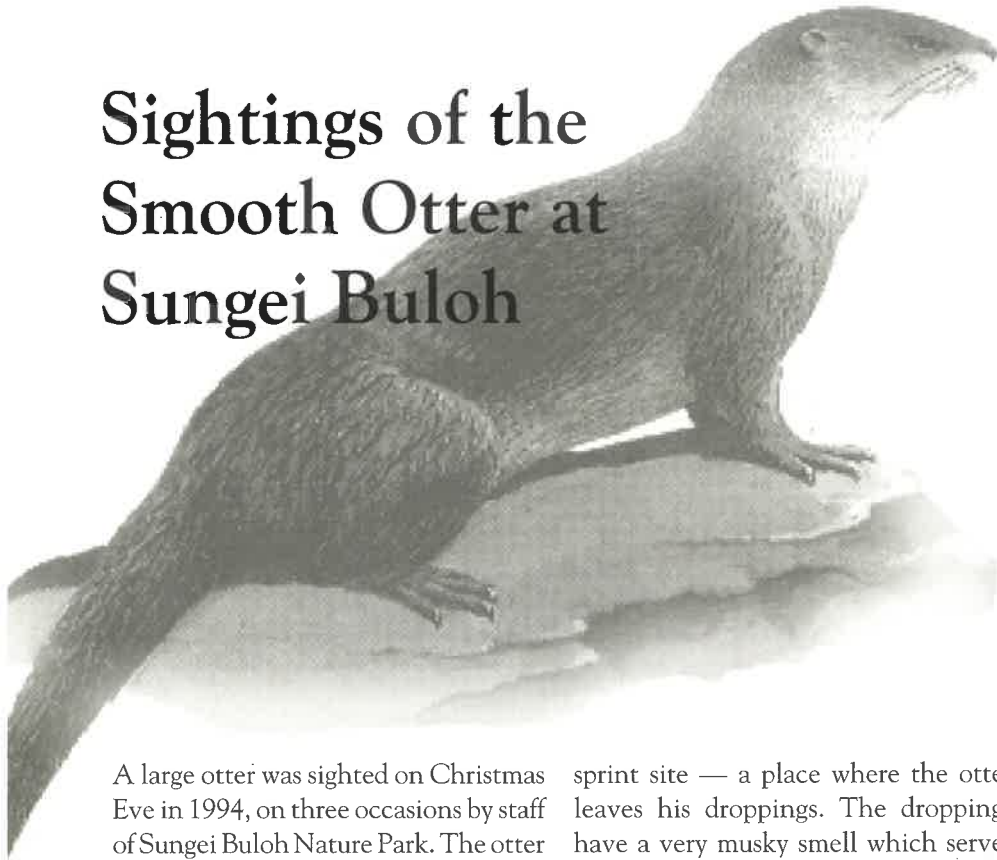
After this mangrove experience, we strolled across the bridge spanning the Sungei Buloh Besar and entered the Reserve. We went into an Observation Hide to take a peek at the birds, and

were surprised to see the trees covered in white! This turned out to be a huge flock of egrets at their roost. They obliged with a breathtaking display of synchronised flight across the tops of trees, to the oohs and aahs of the fascinated watchers.

Coming out of the hide, I noticed a nearly full moon lend its glow, and add a touch of romance to the night. Further into the Reserve, a large Monitor Lizard lumbered across our path and, alarmed by its nocturnal visitors, disappeared with a great splash into the river. We could also hear two water hens quarrelling in the marshes, and the incessant chirping of the cicadas.

Heading back to the Visitor Centre, we stopped awhile at the bridge to enjoy the cool breeze caressing our faces, and the bright lights of Johore Bahru beckoning from just across the river. And as we made our way out of the Reserve, we could hear the familiar "chonk, chonk, chonk" call of the Nightjar, which seemed to be bidding us a fond farewell.

Sightings of the Smooth Otter at Sungei Buloh



A large otter was sighted on Christmas Eve in 1994, on three occasions by staff of Sungei Buloh Nature Park. The otter was first spotted at 1.15 pm swimming in the channel between Sungei Buloh and Pulau Buloh. At 2.45 pm it was seen again, this time scratching the soil along Route 1 of the Park. And at 4 pm the same day, it was observed for about 15 minutes before it disappeared into the water.

The otter was quite large, with a sleek outline and a tail that was flattened on the underside. Based on the descriptions given, the individual was most probably a Smooth Otter (*Lutra perspicillata* Geoffroy 1826). If this identification is correct, it would be the third record of the species being sighted in Singapore. The first record was of a male, collected in 1938 from Lazarus Island, to the south of Singapore. The second otter sighting was recorded at Sungei Buloh in 1990.

On 28 December 1994, N. Sivasothi, a graduate student from the National University of Singapore, came to the Park to look for the otter. Siva is working on the ecology of otters for his Masters of Science degree. After trekking along the bunds, he smelled a familiar scent. His nose led him to a

sprint site — a place where the otter leaves his droppings. The droppings have a very musky smell which serves to advertise the otter's presence to potential mates or competitors. The sprint site was at Sungei Buloh Kechil where the Smooth Otter was previously spotted in 1990.

The otter was again sighted on 15 February 1995 at about 6.30 in the evening. It was low tide then, and the animal was apparently on a fishing trip in the Sungei Buloh Besar. It ran along the mud bunds, and dived into the water at a school of fish. Then it swam to a small island nearby, and started scratching itself. Scanning its surroundings, the otter realized that it was being watched by observers from the bridge. It dived once more into the water, and disappeared into the mangroves.

Otters are found in Singapore, although in small numbers. It is not known whether these animals are resident in the Park or visitors from the Straits of Johore. Sightings of this uncommon carnivore at the Park indicate the importance of Sungei Buloh as a conservation site, not only for the birds, but also for other wetland fauna.

Bird Ringing Station at the Park

To ring a bird is to put a band, with the address of the ringing station, around the leg of a bird. A ringing station is a research base where ringers along the world's bird migratory routes could forward data of birds. Rings are clipped around the leg of a captured bird after its morphometric data, moult patterns, weight changes are recorded. When ringers in other parts of the world capture the bird, they will forward the latest data gathered about the bird to the address on the existing ring.

Sungei Buloh Nature Park has been using rings from the British Trust of Ornithology (B.T.O.), supplied by Dr. David Wells, University of Malaya to ring its waders (shorebirds) and passerines (perching birds). As of February 1995, the Park has set up its own ringing station and the Park's address is engraved on the rings. At present, there is no other ringing station in Singapore.

The wader ringing programme begins in September each year, at the arrival of the migrant birds, till March the following year when they will return to their home ground for breeding. For the period of March till September, the ringers here will not be idle as we had initiated a passerine ringing programme to ring the resident perching birds in order to study their population ecology and movements around the Park and in Singapore.

If bird ringing sounds interesting to you, join us! We need volunteers to assist in the setting up of mist nets and in the retrieval and ringing of birds. Please contact the Scientific Officer at 669-0377 for details.

Education

Watch Science come alive in a classroom without walls! Come to Sungei Buloh Nature Park and experience the wonders of nature ... do a spot of birdwatching, walk through a sea of mangroves, discover the wealth of life in a freshwater pond or watch vegetables grow. These are some of the many learning opportunities available to school groups. Please contact the Education Officer for details.

Activities for September School Holidays

“In-fern-mation”?
“Fern-card”?

Come learn more about ferns this coming September holidays. Call the Education Department for more details.

Do your bit for wildlife

If you

- * love nature
- * like the outdoors
- * are interested in tropical flora and fauna
- * enjoy birdwatching
- * are people oriented ...

Join Us As A Volunteer Guide !

A Training Workshop will be conducted. Phone, fax or write to us:

The Education Officer
Sungei Buloh Nature Park
Neo Tiew Crescent
Singapore 2471
Tel: 669-0377 793-7377 wef Oct 1995
Fax: 669-0371 793-7271 wef Oct 1995

V.I.P. Visits



B.G. Yeo and his family visited the Park on 9 October 1994, escorted by Dr & Mrs Kwa Soon Bee. He found the Park to be “a most happy discovery” after spending an afternoon here. He was briefed on the ecology of the ponds and the impact construction work had on the mangrove habitat. Armed with binoculars and a telescope which our guide brought, the visitors were entertained by the flight antics and feeding behaviour of flocks of egrets, godwits, plovers and sandpipers.

The Stork-billed Kingfisher greeted Mr & Mrs Dhanabalan, who were here on 27 October 1994, by making its rare appearance near the Mangrove Arboretum. The group’s morning stay here was a fruitful one as they saw many other species like the Chinese Egret and Black-capped Kingfisher. Mr Dhanabalan was instrumental to the development of the Park. He happily commented that it was “... a joy to see an idea come to fruition.”

Professor Tommy Koh was here with his staff from the Institute of Policy Studies on 18 February 1995. The group was thrilled to see flocks of migratory birds feeding on the mud-flats and some squealed with excitement when they spotted a Monitor Lizard lumbering across a pond at low tide. Professor Koh had visited the Park before, during the period of construction and was curious to see it again after its completion. He was pleased with the development of the Park and remarked that it is a “... wonderful example of nature conservation...”

Park Information

Opening Hours

- 7.30 am to 7.00 pm on weekdays
- 7.00 am to 7.00 pm on Sundays and public holidays

Admission

- \$1.00 adult
- \$0.50 student, child and senior citizen


AV Show

Monday to Saturday:
9.00 am, 11.00 am, 1.00 pm,
3.00 pm and 5.00 pm
Sundays and Public Holidays:
Hourly from 9.00 am – 5.00 pm

How to get to the Park:

Bus 925 to Kranji Dam on
Mondays to Saturdays and
Park entrance on Sundays
and Public Holidays.

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